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Big Missile Sale to Saudi Arabia Opposed by Key Congress Panels

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WASHINGTON, April 23 — Two key Congressional committees voted today to prevent President Reagan from selling \$354 million worth of advanced missiles to Saudi Arabia.

The actions set the stage for a major showdown over the Administration's Middle East policy in the next two weeks.

Reflecting what are regarded as significant majorities in both the Senate and House, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 11 to 6 against the proposed sale, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee took the same action by an overwhelming voice vote. Only two of the House group's 40 members spoke in favor of the sale.

Both the Senate and the House will vote on the resolutions of disapproval of the missile sale by May 8. If, as seems likely, both houses of Congress oppose the sale by majority votes, it would be the first time that any arms sale was turned down in the 10 years that Congress has had the right to reject arms sales.

But Mr. Reagan has vowed to veto such a vote. It is less certain that those opposed to the sale can muster the necessary two-thirds votes to overturn a Presidential veto.

In another action, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, by a 22-to-18 vote, approved a bill sponsored by Representative Lee H. Hamilton, Democrat of Indiana, chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, to compel the Administration to make public its plans to provide anti-Communist rebels in Angola with covert military aid, and to allow the matter to be debated by Congress.

Mr. Hamilton has argued that the aid given to forces led by Jonas Savimbi, head of the group known as Unita, is too important to be left to covert programs

but should be made a question of public debate. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Dante Fascell, Democrat of Florida, who opposed the Hamilton bill, said he did not believe it would ever be enacted.

The opposition to the Saudi arms sale is being led by Senator Alan Cranston, Democrat of California, and Representative Mel Levine, Democrat of California. There are 64 cosponsors of the resolution of disapproval in the Senate. House opponents are said to represent more than a majority there.

The missile package is for two different types of air-to-air Sidewinder missiles, valued at \$158 million; 200 shoulder-fired Stinger antiaircraft missiles with 600 extra missiles, valued at \$89 million; and 100 air-to-ship Harpoon missiles, valued at \$107 million.

It has been justified by the Reagan Administration as important to demonstrate American support for the Saudis when this important oil producer faces a potential threat from Iran. Also, the Administration contends that the Saudis have been a force for stability in the Persian Gulf and that it was critical that the United States be seen as willing to help them.

Senator Richard G. Lugar, Republican of Indiana, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, was one of the six committee members to vote for the sale this morning. He said: "We risk serious and possibly long-lasting injury to our foreign policy interests in the Middle East if we deny a friendly pro-Western regime the basic tools it needs to defend itself."

"Ultimately, the damage will be

more political than military, as friendly states question our reliability in addressing the multiple security problems in the area," he said.

Others who voted for it were Republicans Jesse A. Helms of North Carolina, Charles McC. Mathias of Maryland, Nancy L. Kassebaum of Kansas and Daniel J. Evans of Washington. Senator Edward Zorinsky, Democrat of Nebraska, also voted for the sale.

Mr. Cranston argued that since the United States was involved in "an undeclared war on terrorism," approval of the sale would send the wrong signal because the Saudis have provided funds to both the Syrians and the Palestine Liberation Organization, both of which have been linked to terrorist activities. He also argued that the Saudis have never supported the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and had not given backing to the peace initiative of King Hussein of Jordan.

In the House committee, Mr. Hamilton spoke out in favor of the sale to the Saudis, saying it was important for the United States not to forsake its friends in the region.

Mr. Levine said, "For nearly two decades, the United States has been almost reflexively granting Saudi arms requests."

"But our policy has neither yielded Saudi support for key United States initiatives, nor resulted in Saudi cooperation in advancing United States security interests in the Middle East," he said.

The opposition to the Saudi sales has arisen even though Israel has not made it an issue, and the leading pro-Israeli lobbying organization, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, has publicly declared that it would not work for the defeat of the sale.